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LEVEL news

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 3, Number 1 **January 13, 1995**

Some Problems, But Conditions Generally Favourable

1994 Good Year On Great Lakes

Conditions on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River were relatively trouble-free in 1994, despite a near-record ice cover through the winter and two wind storms on Lake Erie in the fall.

Thick ice on Lake Erie and in the St. Clair-Detroit Rivers in January and February caused some winter problems for local vessels.

But, ice jams and accompanying flooding that were feared in the spring did not materialize, as a gradual melt allowed for even dissipation of the ice cover.

Except for low St. Lawrence River levels, which caused some problems with late removal of pleasure boats in October, recreational boating on the Great Lakes was generally good throughout the season.

Although extensive ice cover slightly delayed the start of the 1994 navigation season, above normal temperatures and late ice formation in December allowed for a later-than-usual Seaway closing date. The last downbound ship cleared the Snell Lock near Cornwall on December 28. The Welland Canal remained open until December 30.

Two storms on Lake Erie in November did not cause serious shoreline damage, because the lake's level was sufficiently low to allow for resulting storm surges. Despite maximum wind gusts of 110 km per hour, the lake did not rise above its critical level on either occasion.

Flows from Lake Superior were reduced below those prescribed by its regulation plan to allow for repairs to hydropower facilities at Sault Ste. Marie. This resulted in approximately 2 cm of stored water on that lake and a one cm lowering of Lakes Michigan-Huron by the end of October.

Deviations from Lake Ontario's regulation plan resulted in 6 cm of stored water on that lake by the end of July.

Flows from both lakes were increased in December to offset the accumulated water storage.

The above information is adapted from **A Report on the 1994 Water Levels of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River**, *which will soon be available upon request.*

Lake Level Update

The Great Lakes began the New Year at levels very close to those of the same time in 1994. Lakes Superior and Ontario continued at their long-term average levels, while the other lakes remained between 20 and 25 cm above their averages.

Assuming average water supplies, Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie are forecast to remain above their averages for the next six months, while Lakes Superior and Ontario are expected to maintain their near-average trends.

Erie-Niagara Ice Boom

Unseasonably warm temperatures delayed installation of the Lake Erie-Niagara River ice boom until early January.

The boom helps prevent ice jams in the Niagara River. It is usually in place by mid to late December.

Board Assesses Possibilities

The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control is assessing potential improvements to the regulation of Lake Ontario's outflows.

One potential plan, called Plan 35-P is a product of the International Joint Commission's Levels Reference Study, which was completed in March of 1993.

The second plan, called IS-4, uses an "optimization" technique, which attempts to achieve the best possible compromise to serve a combination of purposes.

Both potential plans take into consideration the needs and preferences of hydropower, navigation, recreational boating, shoreline property and environmental interests.

Over the next three years, the Board will simulate water levels and flows that could be generated by each of these plans.

The existing regulaton plan will remain in effect during this period.

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